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A RESERVOIR OF WISDOM :

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A Program of Dignity and
Equal Opportunity for the Elderly. >

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GOVERNOR. KARL F. ROLVAAG,



A Special Message to Members of the
Sixty-fourth Legislative Session

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STATE OF MINNESOTA

Friday, February 26, 1965. 4 C 1

Senior citizens

To the Members of the Legislature:

Chief among the qualities that make Minnesota great is the reservoir of wisdom and experience of our older citizens.

They built this government -- this system of laws.

They saw the needs -- for schools and colleges and hospitals, and they acted to meet those needs.

They established the traditions we cherish -- the belief in the worth and value of each citizen; the commitment to equal opportunity for all.

It is in the spirit of that legacy that I address you today. Ours is the responsibility to fulfill the promise, to make sure that there is equal opportunity for the elderly -- opportunity to be heard, to participate in the affairs of state, to help bring about the development and growth of our economy.

What are some of the facts which press this responsibility upon us? The elderly now comprise 10.7 percent of our population. They number more than 374,000.

We have the eleventh highest percentage of senior citizens of any state in the nation.

Not only are they growing in numbers but the life span in Minnesota is extending so that we are now among the longest lived people in the country.

In 1900, the average Minnesotan lived only 48 years.

In 1965, he may expect to live to at least 72 years, and can live to well over 100. (One resident of Minnesota is now over 120 years old, and one couple -- he is 105, and she is in her nineties -- celebrated their 73rd wedding anniversary! They still live independently in their own home.)

This past fall, because of Minnesota's concern for all of its people, and because our older citizens do not always have the opportunity to be heard, the Governor's Citizens Council on Aging conducted a series of 23 hearings in all sections of the state.

Older citizens from every county were invited to express their views, and they did, forthrightly and simply. What did they say?

The older citizen requested the right to enjoy respect and to be treated with dignity. He asked for equal rights with all citizens. He wanted the opportunity to live, and not just exist.

More specifically, the senior citizens stated that they would like:

1. To remain independent and to reside in their own homes.
2. To have the financial resources necessary to live in dignity, and to maintain good health.
3. To continue to be productive.

4. To be able to make fruitful use of the many hours of leisure.
5. To continue to be a participant in the main stream, in the growth and development of our state.

Over and again, they testified that they do not want to be second-class citizens.

They do not want to have to declare themselves paupers before becoming eligible for medical assistance.

They do not want to be penalized for age -- which is just what occurs when people must live on fixed incomes while prices and taxes rise all around them.

They do not want to be deprived of the opportunity to make a contribution of their talents and skills.

As an outgrowth of these hearings we have established certain priorities and needs, and it is these needs which I urge you now to consider.

1. TAX RELIEF

Tax relief is the number one concern of the older citizen of our state. Their ability to remain in their own homes is continually threatened by rising property taxes which require an increasingly disproportionate share of their fixed and limited incomes.

I wish I could share with you the letters that come daily to my office describing what it is like to give up one's home, because there is just not enough money to meet one's tax obligations.

The Governor's Citizens Council on Aging has recommended a system of tax relief for persons sixty-five and over who own their homes. I fully endorse that proposal and urge that the legislature provide:

REAL PROPERTY TAX RELIEF TO PERSONS SIXTY-FIVE OR OVER WHO OWN THEIR HOMES, THROUGH THE SYSTEM OF TAX CREDITS AND REFUNDS.

I am aware that many bills are already before you which embody this concept. Three basic provisions should be included in the bill that is finally adopted if it is to be workable and effective.

1. The system of tax credits and refunds should be designed so that the local government tax base is in no way endangered.
2. State tax credits should be provided to reimburse the older citizen for local property taxes paid.
3. Tax relief should be made available for those who need it most. I propose that the bill allow for property tax relief of approximately \$4 million per year, \$8 million for the biennium, to some 100,000 Minnesota residents sixty-five or over.

II. HOUSING

It became very clear, at the recent hearings, that there is not sufficient suitable housing for the elderly in Minnesota, particularly in the low income group.

The major cities have made significant strides in providing low-rent public housing for the older citizens.

However, there is actually a larger percentage of elderly persons in the rural areas (17 percent in one county), and these areas are unable to participate fully in the low-rent public housing program because of statutory limitations.

Therefore, I recommend:

REMEDIAL LEGISLATION TO INCLUDE COUNTIES IN THE DEFINITION OF THE MUNICIPAL AND HOUSING DEVELOPMENT ACT, IN ORDER THAT COUNTIES MAY MAKE USE OF THE FEDERAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR LOW-INCOME HOUSING FOR ELDERLY PERSONS.

III. ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE

Ceiling on old age assistance

Many studies have demonstrated that if the older citizen is permitted to live independently he remains healthier, more vigorous, more content.

The Morrison County demonstration project for the chronically ill and aged has shown that by having some extra help in the home during time of illness, the older citizen is often enabled to remain independent and self-sufficient for a longer period of time. But the unfortunate fact is that our \$71 ceiling on Old Age Assistance does nothing to encourage this type of self-sufficiency. It actually mitigates against it, because it does not permit the payment of Old Age Assistance money for homemaker assistance.

Let me give you an example:

In the one county where there is a homemaker program (it has been provided through the Public Health Nursing Service) we have proof that when a homemaker came in to help out an ailing couple, the result was a net saving to the state of \$1200 per individual per year.

Had this man and his wife been placed in a nursing home -- and that is where they would have had to go, if they had not had the help of a homemaker -- the additional cost to the taxpayer, over and above what was paid out for their maintenance costs in their own home, would have been \$1200 for each of them for a year.

If this is projected for even one-tenth of the persons now receiving Old Age Assistance, it would come to close to \$4 million dollars. That is what might be saved if we helped our elderly to remain in their own homes by providing needed home assistance.

This can only be accomplished by removing the \$71 maximum ceiling, and providing for OAA grants based on actual need, including need for home assistance.

Therefore, to make sure that those elderly persons who are able to do so may remain in their own homes, and to make the best use of the tax dollars that these programs require:

I RECOMMEND THE REMOVAL OF THE \$71 MAXIMUM ON OLD AGE ASSISTANCE GRANTS, AND URGE THAT THESE GRANTS BE BASED ENTIRELY ON THE ACTUAL NEED OF THE RECIPIENT.

Lien Law

At present, we find ourselves in the curious situation of having two sets of standards for older citizens who receive state assistance.

On the one hand, the eligibility requirements for the Medical Aid to the Aged program permit an applicant to have a higher annual income, and larger assets, than are permitted for eligibility for Old Age Assistance. This inequity is made even more acute by the fact that applicants for Medical Aid to the Aged are not required to have a lien placed against their property as are the recipients of Old Age Assistance.

Time and again, at the hearings, the older citizens of our state questioned this disparity.

The Governor's Citizens Council on Aging has studied the problem and has recommended the removal of the lien, to achieve uniformity between the two programs.

THEREFORE, I RECOMMEND TO YOU THAT THE LIEN ON OLD AGE ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS' PROPERTY BE REMOVED SO THAT FAIR AND EQUAL TREATMENT WILL BE AFFORDED EACH OF OUR OLDER CITIZENS.

IV. GOVERNOR'S CITIZENS COUNCIL ON AGING

I have already put on your desks my budget recommendations in support of the activities of the Governor's Citizens Council on Aging for the coming biennium.

In addition to providing for the continuance of the Council's present staff of four, it calls for an additional coordinator to serve the Northeastern area of the state, and an assistant to the director of the Council.

The rapidly increasing demand from local communities and counties for help in developing programs for the aging have put a heavy burden on the limited staff. Forty local committees are presently at work and their needs require all the time of the personnel now available. With the addition of one regional coordinator, plus an administrative assistant for the director, we can carry the program on aging into every community of the state, making optimum use of existing resources, and developing maximum local responsibility.

The proposed budget also provides necessary expense money for Council members.

You will recall that the Governor's Citizens Council on Aging was established by statute in 1957 and is comprised of 25 appointees. For the past biennium, the chairman of the Council and many of the members have provided from their own pockets for much of the expense incurred in Council activities -- secretarial help, reproduction of minutes and reports for their committees, plus travel and other incidental expenses.

Minnesota has been most fortunate in that the chairman of the Council, Mrs. Walter W. Walker, has for several years served also as the executive director of the Council's work at no expense to the state.

Mrs. Walker's contributions have been of immeasurable value and I here wish to express gratitude and appreciation for her leadership and concern in improving the well-being of the elderly in Minnesota.

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What I have put before you today represents a broad and constructive program to meet our responsibilities to the elderly citizens of our state. It is a program that was developed by senior citizens themselves in consultation with the Citizens Advisory Council.

I am confident that you will give it your careful attention.